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ABSTRACT

The Child Development Associate (CDA) National Credentialing Program is a national system to improve the professional competence of early childhood teaching staff. This report presents the findings of the 1999 national survey to assess the impact of credentialing on individuals' careers and professional development. A sample of 4,993 CDAs was randomly selected from those credentialed in five selected years (1998, 1997, 1996, 1993, 1989), yielding three groups for comparison: (1) recently credentialed; (2) mid-level; and (3) veteran. The response rate was approximately 20 percent. The major findings indicate that half the respondents received the CDA between 26 and 40 years of age. Respondents were more diverse with regard to race/ethnicity than the U.S. population as a whole. Thirty percent had been Head Start parents. Over 40 percent had some college education at time of credentialing, with all groups tending to attain degrees after credentialing. There was an increase in the percentage who were teachers or held supervisory positions between the time of credentialing and the survey. Increases in salary over time were reported by all groups. Most respondents reported receiving training through coursework, pre- or inservice training, and continuing education units. Over 60 percent reported not having to pay for any portion of their CDA training, with the percentage receiving financial support decreasing over the past 10 years. Changes directly linked to credentialing were most often increased salary or promotions. Seventy-seven percent of veterans were still in early childhood education, compared to 81 percent of mid-level group, and 90 percent of new CDAs. (KB)

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The 1999 National Survey of Child Development Associates (CDAs)

Council for Professional Recognition

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Introduction

The Child Development Associate (CDA) National Credentialing Program is a national system to improve the quality of early childhood education programs by improving the professional competence of the teaching staff. Initiated in 1971, the program is designed to assess and credential early care and educational professionals based on performance.

Since 1985, the Council for Professional Recognition has administered the CDA program. CDAs work as caregivers and teachers in Head Start programs, infant-toddler centers, preschools, child care centers, and as home visitors. Since the inception of the program, more than120,000 individuals have been credentialed. As a result of an increase in demand for trained, qualified staff, the number of applications for the CDA has grown to approximately 10,000 annually. Furthermore, 46 states plus the District of Columbia now incorporate the CDA credential into their child care center licensing regulations.

Every five years since 1983, a survey of CDAs has been conducted to assess the impact of credentialing on individuals' careers and professional development. This report presents the results of the most recent survey conducted in1999.

Questions

The Survey was designed to address the following key questions about CDAs:

- Who are CDAs? What demographic characteristics describe the survey respondents?
- What is known about CDAs' education and experience at the time of credentialing and currently?
- How are CDA candidates meeting the education requirement for the Credential? To what extent are they earning college credit? To what extent are CDAs participating in continuing education?
- What professional changes occur after receiving a CDA Credential? Do CDAs receive promotions? Are salaries increasing?
- What is the retention rate for CDAs in the early childhood field? What factors influence those who leave the profession?

Methodology

The Council worked in collaboration with Howard University's Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk (CRESPAR) to conduct the survey and analyze the responses. This report builds on previous surveys of CDA's conducted in 1983, 1988, and 1994.

A sample of 4,993 CDAs was randomly selected from among all persons credentialed in five selected years. Surveys were mailed to 10% of CDAs awarded in 1998, 1997, and 1996, and to 20% of those awarded in 1993 and 1989. The inclusion of the latter two years allowed, for the first time, a longitudinal comparison of CDAs. Slightly over 1,000 surveys were returned, a

response rate of approximately 20%. Of the total responses, 966 were fully completed. The small sample size and low response rate limits the generalizability of the findings. The sample included: 690 recent CDAs (those credentialed one to three years prior to the survey); 134 mid-level CDAs (credentialed 6 years prior to survey); and 142 veteran CDAs (credentialed 10 years prior to survey). Respondents were from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and U.S. military bases overseas.

Findings

Who are CDAs?

CDAs are overwhelmingly female, 98.9% for all three groups, a finding consistent with all previous surveys. Approximately half (49.7%) of all respondents earned a CDA between 26 and 40 years of age. An increasingly large minority (39% as compared to 33% in 1994) were over 40. Consistent with previous surveys, the number of CDAs under 25 remains relatively small at about 11%. Comparison of new, mid-level, and veteran CDAs demonstrates a trend of increasing age at time of credentialing.

With regard to race/ethnicity, survey respondents are more diverse than the U.S. population as a whole, while also more reflective of the population of early childhood programs, especially Head Start. Slightly over half, 52%, of respondents are Caucasian, a figure roughly consistent with previous surveys. The percentage of African-American respondents declined in each of the last two surveys, from 34% in 1988 to 24.4% in the current survey, a pattern similar to the comparison among veteran, mid-level, and new CDAs. Hispanic/Latino respondents increased from 9% in the 1988 survey to almost 12% in 1999. Respondents also included Native Americans (4.1%) and Asian Americans (1.5).

One interesting finding of the survey is that 30% of all respondents had been Head Start parents at one time. Veteran CDAs were more likely to have been Head Start parents (38.7%), but among those credentialed most recently, 29.4% report having been a Head Start parent.

CDA offers several setting endorsements. Preschool continues to be the most widely used with 74.7% of respondents; 14.9% hold the infant/toddler endorsement; 7.8% have the family child care endorsement; and 2.6 are home visitors. About 8% of respondents indicated that they have a CDA language specialization with 90% bilingual and the remainder monolingual Spanish.

What about CDAs' education and experience?

Respondents provided information about their educational and early childhood experiences for two time periods, at the time of credentialing and at the time of survey administration to examine changes in these dimensions over time. The survey addressed educational background, years of experience, type of child care setting, professional positions, and salaries.

A) Educational background

Over 40% of CDAs in all three groups had some college at the time of credentialing, and

21% had completed at least a 2-year degree. All groups tended to attain more 2 or 4-year degrees after credentialing. This trend was strongest among those who had been CDA's for six years. In this group, 22% held degrees when they became CDAs, while 33% had obtained degrees by the time of the survey. Moreover, the percentage of CDAs completing advanced graduate degrees more than doubled for veteran CDAs and increased slightly for new CDAs.

B) Years of early childhood experience

At the time of credentialing, 65.6% of veteran-, 55.8% of mid-level-, and 56.3 of new CDAs had more than six years of experience in child care. As expected, all groups' experience increased over time and the veteran CDAs showed the greatest increase in experience. However, the veteran CDAs experienced more years of child care experience prior to and after credentialing than either the mid-level- or new CDAs.

C) Setting

Traditionally, a majority of CDAs have been affiliated with Head Start. In the current study, half of the respondents worked in some type of Head Start setting at the time of credentialing and approximately the same number (48%) were still with Head Start at the time of the survey. However, the proportion of those with Head Start at the time of credentialing shows a distinct decline over time: from 70% in the veteran group, to 48% in the mid-level group, to 45% in the new group. Correspondingly, the majority of mid-level (52%) and new CDAs (54%) are employed in non-Head start settings such as child care centers, preschools, and family child care homes.

D) Professional position

At the time of credentialing, 36% of respondents had been assistant teachers or aides, while only 21% still held these positions at the time of the survey. The percentage who were teachers increased from 37 to 45%, and those who were center directors or supervisors grew from 9% to 14%. As expected, the percentage holding supervisory positions was substantially higher for CDAs with 10 years experience than for newer CDAs. Nearly 40% currently hold positions in which they supervise early childhood personnel.

E) Salary

Increases in salary over time were reported by all groups. At the time of credentialing, the annual salaries of over 70% of CDAs in all groups were under $15,000. However, at the time of the survey, less than one-third of mid-level CDAs (31.4%) and veterans (33%) still earned under $15,000; while 61.1% of new CDAs still earned under $15,000. Sixty percent of veteran-, 58% of mid-level-, and 34.7% of new CDAs reported current annual earnings between $15,000-29,000. Moreover, the percentage of CDAs earning $20,000 or more annually more than doubled for veteran and mid-level CDAs and nearly doubled for new CDAs from credentialing to survey time.

How are CDAs meeting their education requirements?

The Council requires that CDA candidates complete 120-clock hours of formal education distributed across eight subject areas of early childhood/child care. The Council strongly encourages, but does not require, that this requirement be met through degree-track credit. Survey questions addressed where training was obtained, whether college credit was earned for training, and what supports were available to candidates.

Because the survey questions allowed for multiple responses, it is not possible to clearly analyze the degree to which the goal of degree-track credit is being earned. Most CDAs reported receiving training through credit and non-credit courses (58.6%), followed by pre- or in-service training (42.2%), and continuing educations units/CEUs (38.2).

In terms of training delivery systems, CDAs reported receiving their training at a Head Start facility (38.7%), followed by at a community college (28.3%), at a non-Head Start facility (20.2%), at a four-year college/university (14.1%), and through military institutions (4.5%). A greater percentage of veteran CDAs (55.6%) were trained at a Head Start facility than mid-level (35.8%) or new (35.8%) CDAs. A greater percentage of mid-level and new CDAs received training at a 2-year college, non-Head Start early childhood organization, vocational/technical school, and/or in the military than veteran CDAs.

Despite the fact that CDA candidates can meet the education requirement with 120 hours of non-credit training, the survey found that 40% received college credit for some or all training they received to fulfill this requirement. Most reported receiving between 3 and 12 credits. A greater percentage of veteran CDAs (48%) received this benefit over mid-level (41%) and new CDAs (38%).

Over 61% reported not having to pay for any portion of their CDA training. However, the percentage of CDAs receiving financial support toward training substantially decreased over the past 10 years. More mid-level and new CDAs are paying a portion of their training expenses (43% and 40% respectively) than veterans (27%).

What professional changes occur after CDA credentialing?

The survey asked about changes directly linked to receiving the CDA credential. These changes included possible salary increases, promotions, job changes, and retention in the field.

Overall, 51.1% of CDAs indicated that they received salary increases after earning their CDA credential. A greater percentage of mid-level CDAs (60.4%) reported receiving salary increases after credentialing than veteran (52.1%) or new (49.1%) CDAs. Approximately 70% of all CDAs received annual salary increases up to $500. The percentage of new CDAs (20.9) receiving an increase of over $1,000 in annual salary was more than double that of the other groups.

Regarding promotions, 32% of all respondents reported receiving a promotion upon earning the Credential. A substantially greater percentage of veterans CDAs (45.1%) received promotions as a result of their CDA training than mid-level- (29.1%) or new (28.3%) CDAs. For

a large majority (85%), the new position was with the same employer.

Among the most encouraging findings of the survey related to the issue of retention. Traditionally, the early childhood field has been plagued by high rates of staff turnover that seriously threaten the quality of programs provided for children and families. Among all survey respondents, 87% reported that they are still in early childhood education. Even in the veteran group, almost 77% are still in the profession a full 10 years after credentialing, as are approximately 81% of the mid-level group, and 90% of new CDAs. These figures cannot be generalized to all CDAs, of course, given the size of the sample and the fact that those who are committed to the field are more likely to return the survey. Nevertheless, in a field where turnover rates can be as high as 80% or higher, any good news on retention is most welcome. Among respondents who had left the field, "salary" was the most common reason (35%), but other considerations including "personal/family circumstances" and "new career interests" were also frequently mentioned.

In terms of ongoing professional development, 22% of respondents reported that they have been awarded college credit toward a degree for having a CDA. Approximately 60% are members of early childhood professional associations with the largest number belonging to NAEYC followed by NHSA.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings of the 1999 National Survey of CDAs have implications for the future of CDA and for the field of early childhood education and professional development. The profile of CDAs painted by the survey demonstrates that the CDA credential provides a useful entry point to the profession for those who make mid-life decisions to pursue early childhood education. We also see that CDA continues to be a vehicle for Head Start parents to pursue careers in the field. Another important contribution that CDA continues to make is toward maintaining diversity in the workforce, so that teachers and caregivers reflect the cultures and languages of the communities they serve.

CDA was originally intended to serve as a new category of early childhood professional for the entire field. Because Head Start funded its development and subsequently required the credential of its teachers, the credential has been traditionally associated with the Head Start program. However, the survey indicates that the credential is now meeting its promise to serve the field with the majority of CDAs now employed in non-Head Start settings.

Over the decade of the 1990s, the field has put considerable energy into working on professional development systems that promote degree-track credit for training and articulation among levels from CDA to associate- to baccalaureate-degree. Much work remains to be done, however. While 40% of all respondents reported receiving some credit, the survey did not demonstrate improvement over time in obtaining credit for CDA training. A greater percentage of 1989 CDAs received their training through Head Start than those from the later groups. More of those credentialed in 1993 and 1996-98 received training at 2-year colleges, vocational or technical schools, early childhood organizations, and the military than did the 1989 group.

An important finding is the degree to which CDAs participate in continued professional development, join professional organizations (an increase over previous surveys), and work toward and achieve college degrees.

Many survey respondents reported promotions and salary increases, although relatively small, following credentialing. In addition salary comparisons between time of credentialing and survey show a trend toward increased salaries over time, although these improvements cannot be attributed to achieving the Credential alone. Certainly, these career achievements are primarily the result of additional years of experience and education especially for the mid-level and veteran CDAs. Nevertheless, CDA did provide the entry point and for many, fostered the motivation and commitment to the profession necessary to continue.

Data also demonstrate the degree to which low salaries remain resistant to change. At the time of credentialing, 72.1% of all CDAs earned less than $15,000 but at the time of survey, 53.6% still earned less than $15,000. With a majority of respondents earning such low wages, the 87% overall retention rate is even more surprising. The relatively high retention rate for CDAs in this survey is definitely an issue that warrants further study.